

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ROME 06140 01 OF 02 041522Z  
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INFO USLO PEKING  
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI  
AMCONSUL HONGKONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 6140

FROM VATICAN OFFICE

E.O. 11652 GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, CH, VT  
SUBJECT: THE VATICAN AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

1. SUMMARY. THE PRESENCE OF TWO CATHOLIC BISHOPS AT THE FEBRUARY 1978 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE HAS ENGENDERED A FLURRY OF JOURNALISTIC SPECULATION REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF RENEWED CONTACTS BETWEEN THE VATICAN AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC). THE VATICAN, WHICH FOR SOME TIME HAS SOUGHT AN OPENING FOR CONTACTS WITH THE PRC, HAS REFRAINED FROM ANY PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT BUT PRIVATELY SEES SOME ELEMENTS OF HOPE IN IT. THIS TELEGRAM TO PLACE THE CURRENT SPECULATION IN PERSPECTIVE. END SUMMARY

2. AT THE FEBRUARY 1978 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S POLITICAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE, AMONG THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS PRESENT WERE TWO CATHOLIC BISHOPS--THE 81 YEAR OLD ARCHBISHOP PI SHU SHIH OF MUKDEN, WHO WAS APPOINTED IN 1949, AND THE ILLEGALLY CONSECRATED JESUIT BISHOP CHANG  
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PAGE 02 ROME 06140 01 OF 02 041522Z

SHU. THIS DEVELOPMENT HAS PRODUCED, ESPECIALLY IN ITALY, MUCH SPECULATION THAT IT IS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW RELIGIOUS POLICY IN THE PRC AND MORE PARTICULARLY THAT IT IS A PRC SIGNAL FOR CONTACTS WITH THE VATICAN. THE VATICAN, WHILE HOPEFUL THAT THERE MIGHT BE A CHANGE FORTHCOMING IN THE PRC'S RELIGIOUS POLICY, CONSIDERS THE DEVELOPMENT, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT RUN, AS PRIMARILY AN EFFORT BY THE NEW LEADERSHIP TO

OBTAIN SUPPORT FOR ITS NEW ECONOMIC POLICIES FROM ALL SECTORS OF SOCIETY, RATHER THAN AS A SIGNAL FOR CONTACTS WITH THE VATICAN. IT HAS, THEREFORE, BEEN VERY GUARDED IN ITS RESPONSE TO THE NEWS OF THE BISHOPS' PRESENCE AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF VATICAN VIEWS ON THE PRC IS BASED ON SEVERAL CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATIONS WITH THREE VATICAN OFFICIALS WHO FOLLOW CLOSELY CHINESE DEVELOPMENTS.

3. VATICAN SOURCES TELL US THAT THE VATICAN HAS VERY LITTLE NEW INFORMATION OR, FOR THAT MATTER ON THE FATE OF SOME 40 TO 80 BISHOPS IN CHINA). BOTH BISHOPS APPARENTLY HAD DISAPPEARED FROM THE SCENE FOLLOWING THE UPHEAVAL OF THE 1966 CULTURAL REVOLUTION. THEY ARE LEADERS IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL PATRIOTIC ASSOCIATION WHICH WAS CREATED IN 1957 FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORCING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA TO SEVER ITS LINKS WITH THE VATICAN. ARCHBISHOP PI SHU-SHIH WAS ACTUALLY ELECTED PREIDENT OF THE ORGANIZATION AND THE BISHOP CHANG CHA-SHU WAS ONE OF SEVERAL "PATRIOTIC" BISHOPS WHO WERE ILLEGALLY (I.E. WITHOUT VATICAN PERMISSION) CONSECRATED BY ARCHBISHOP PI SHU-SHIH IN 1958. THE VATICAN INITIALLY CONSIDERED THIS "PATRIOTIC" HIERARCHY AS SCHISMATIC, BUT IN RECENT YEARS, IN VIEW OF THE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THE CHURCH IN CHINA, THE TERM "SCHISMATIC" HAS NOT BEEN USED AND THE VATICAN MADE SEVERAL UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO RENEW CONTACT WITH THE HIERARCHY.

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PAGE 03 ROME 06140 01 OF 02 041522Z

4. WHILE NONE OF THE VATICAN NEWS ORGANS HAVE TAKEN NOTE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, VATICAN OFFICIALS ADMIT THAT THE APPEARANCE OF THE BISHOPS IS AN INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT WHICH MAY EVENTUALLY PRODUCE AN OPENING IN VATICAN-PRC CONTACTS. A HIGH VATICAN OFFICIAL TOLD US THAT THE DEVELOPMENT SEEMS TO BE AN EFFORT TO RE-ESTABLISH THE STATUS QUO WHICH EXISTED BEFORE THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THAT WHILE THIS WAS NOT AN IDEAL

SITUATION, IT WAS BETTER THAN THE SITUATION PREVAILING AFTER THE REVOLUTION. IN THIS CONTEXT, VATICAN OFFICIALS CONSIDER THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE TWO BISHOPS AS SUGGESTING THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA IS STILL CONSIDERED SUFFICIENTLY SIGNIFICANT TO WARRANT REPRESENTATIVE LEVEL. THESE SAME OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, CONSIDER THAT THE TWO CATHOLIC LEADERS ARE OLD AND POWERLESS AND THEREFORE UNLIKELY TO HAVE MUCH INFLUENCE IN CHANGING THE PRC'S RELIGIOUS POLICY. THESE SOURCES ATTACH MORE SIGNIFICANCE TO A STATEMENT AT THE ASSEMBLY BY VICE CHAIRMAN HSU TEH HENG, WHO CHARGED THAT THE RADICALS HAD "UNDERMINED THE ENFORCEMENT OF POLICY" TOWARD RELIGION AND RE INTERESTED IN SEEING WHETHER THIS MIGHT LEAD TO THE ELIMINATION FROM THE NEW CONSTITUTION OF THE CLAUSE WHICH AUTHORIZES CHINESE CITIZENS

TO "COMBAT RELIGION, WHICH WAS APPARENTLY ONLY ADDED IN 1975.  
AN ADDITIONAL REPORT WHICH THE VATICAN  
IS FOLLOWING WITH INTEREST IS THE POSSIBLE REOPENING OF THE  
CATHOLIC CATHEDRALS IN SHANGHAI, HANKOW AND CANTON. IF LEGALLY  
APPOINTED BISHOPS ARE PUT IN CHARGE OF THESE CATHEDRALS, WHICH  
ARE REPORTEDLY CURRENTLY BEING CLEANED UP, THE VATICAN IS PREPARED TO  
VIEW IT AS A CLEAR SIGNAL FOR CONTACTS WITH THE VATICAN.

5. AS WE HAD OCCASION TO REPORT PREVIOUSLY, THE CURRENT  
PONTIFF, POPE PAUL VI, HAS KEPT A CONTINUING INTEREST IN THE  
POSSIBILITY OF OPENING UP CONTACTS WITH THE PRC. SINCE THE  
BEGINNING OF HIS PONTIFICATE IN 1963, THE VATICAN HAS DIRECTED  
NUMEROUS SIGNALS TO THE PRC FOR THE RESUMPTION OF THE CONTACTS  
WHICH CEASED IN 1951 WHEN THE PAPAL NUNCIO WAS EXPELLED FROM  
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PAGE 04 ROME 06140 01 OF 02 041522Z

MAINLAND CHINA. AMONG THESE SIGNALS WERE: THE POPE'S  
ADVOCACY OF UN MEMBERSHIP FOR THE PRC IN 1965, THE POPE'S

NOTE BY OC/T: MESSAGE AS RECEIVED.

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PAGE 01 ROME 06140 02 OF 02 051110Z  
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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1814

INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 6140

DECISION IN 1972 TO TRANSFER THE PERMANENT RESIDENCE OF  
THE HONORABLE SEE'S PRO-NUNCIO FROM TAIWAN TO BANGLADESH  
AND THE POPE'S STATEMENT IN 1967 IN WHICH HE SPECIFICALLY

STATED HIS DESIRE TO "TALK ABOUT PEACE WITH THOSE IN CHARGE OF CHINA'S DESTINY." THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN A NUMBER OF QUIET DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS THROUGH VARIOUS INTERMEDIARIES TO ESTABLISH CONTACTS.

6. COMMENT. SINCE NUMEROUS VATICAN SIGNALS HAVE NOT YET BEEN CLEARLY RECIPROCATED BY THE PRC, THE VATICAN IS GUARDED ABOUT PLACING GREAT IMPORTANCE ON THIS DEVELOPMENT. BUT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF IT, THE VATICAN HAS STEPPED-UP ITS INTEREST IN CHINESE DEVELOPMENTS. PAPAL DIPLOMATS OVERSEAS (PARTICULARLY AT THE UN IN VIENNA) HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO BE HIGHLY ATTENTIVE TO DETECTING POSSIBLE PRC DIPLOMATIC SIGNALS FOR OPENING UP OF CONTACTS AND THE VATICAN'S SECRETARIAT OF STATE IS CAREFULLY SIFTING REPORTS OUT OF CHINA TO DETERMINE WHETHER CHINESE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS HAVE SET IN MOTION A REAL CHANGE FOR RELIGION IN CHINA. IN THIS EFFORT THE VATICAN RELIES ON FOUR SOURCES OF INFORMATION: (A) THE SPECIAL DEPARTMENT FOR CHINESE STUDIES WHICH COLLECTS INFORMATION AND MAINTAINS CONTACTS WITH VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS  
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PAGE 02 ROME 06140 02 OF 02 051110Z

CONCERNED IN HONG KONG WHO EDIT THE WEEKLY "CHINA NEWS ANALYSIS" (C) REPORTS FROM PRIESTS WHO ARE ALLOWED TO VISIT CHINA; AND (D) INFORMATION FROM FRIENDLY COUNTRIES SUCH AS FRANCE, SPAIN AND ITALY WITH EMBASSIES IN PEKING. ON THE BASIS OF STILL FRAGMENTARY INFORMATION, THE VATICAN BELIEVES THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS SURVIVING UNDERGROUND IN CHINA AND IT ESTIMATES THAT THE CATHOLIC PRESENCE IN CHINA TODAY CONSISTS OF 2.5 MILLION FAITHFUL, 1000 PRIESTS AND SOME 40 TO 80 BISHOPS.  
HOLMES

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## Message Attributes

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